

Bringing Back the Gospel

By Thomas W. Bear

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Introduction

Section 1: Preparing for the Work of Evangelism

*Refine your understanding of evangelism.
Know the major barrier to the gospel.
They reasoned about sin, righteousness and judgment
How did Jesus and the apostles share the “good news?”*

*Prepare your heart.
Ambassadors of Christ reflect humility
Ambassadors of Christ love as Christ loved
Discern your motives.
Count the cost*

Section 2: Doing the Work of Evangelism

*Sow the gospel seed.
Don't hide your purpose or identity as a Christian.
Prepare the soil by helping them see their predicament.
Steer conversations down the biblical path!
Know the milestones of an Effective Gospel Discussion
Fulfill your role as one of God's “prophets.”
Help the hearer understand the cost of discipleship.
Observe the reaction to evaluate progress.
Consider the culture but never alter the message!
Do not rely on extra-biblical, intellectual arguments.
Avoid arguing with unbelievers about their pet points.
Discern when to stop talking
Don't wait to evangelize!
Remember that Gospel proclamation is foundational.
Be encouraged as you sow.*

Water the Gospel Seed.

*Harvest the crop.
Know what people must do to be saved.
Discern when a sinner starts believing in Christ.
Baptize them and teach them to observe all things.*

Section 3: Expect Opposition!

*Expect satanic opposition
Resign yourself to a life of rejection.
Know the reason the world hates us.
Be prepared for cultural clashes.*

Section 4: Pray or forget it!

Conclusion

Appendixes

Appendix A: Try Exalting Christ through Door-to-Door Evangelism!

Appendix B: What does it mean to “Call upon the Lord?”

Appendix C: Integrating New Believers into Local Churches

Appendix D: Use the Book of Romans to Present the Gospel

Appendix E: God's Redemption Message Study Guide

Appendix F: Using tracts and gospel literature

Appendix G: Team evangelism etiquette

Introduction

Jesus told us to go and make disciples from people of all nations and to teach them to observe all the things He commanded (Matthew 28:18-20). Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus also said that we would be witnesses of Him to the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8). It is possible to be a witness without being purposeful about it. For example, we could be walking down the street singing a song of praise to God while unaware that an unbeliever is watching and listening. Or, we could be praying softly with a heart of thankfulness affirming God's goodness in the face of great adversity unaware that an unbeliever is observing us. In these examples, we could have been witnessing unto Christ even though we were not aware that we were doing so. Therefore, it is possible at any given moment to be witnesses unto Jesus without necessarily being purposely engaged in the work of "making disciples." To follow Jesus' command to **go and make disciples**, we must do so purposefully. The Bible teaches that the intentional work of presenting the gospel is the primary means for making disciples. Paul stated, "*The gospel is THE power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes*" (Romans 1:16). Because the presentation of the gospel is THE primary and necessary means that God has prescribed in making disciples, this book concentrates on the content of the gospel message and methods that the Bible teaches us to use in order to effectively present it.

Let me tell you up front that it is likely that some of the information in this book will go against the grain of your current understanding of evangelism. When you come across a statement that does not fit your understanding of evangelism, do not assume that it is false just because you have not heard it before. I am not a lone voice. Many men have written similar things in centuries past. I believe that if men like Charles Spurgeon and Jonathan Edwards were alive today and read this book, they would be in full agreement with it. If you consider yourself a serious student of the Bible and you read this book prayerfully, I believe you will be challenged, encouraged and better equipped to do the work of evangelism.

It has been about two thousand years since Jesus issued the great commission to go and make disciples of all nations. These days, Christians generally believe that the good news of Jesus Christ should be presented in a manner that is not offensive to the hearer. Most think it is inappropriate to use gospel presentation methods that mention much about sin and hell. Evangelists that use them are often thought of as "hellfire and brimstone" preachers. What image comes to your mind when you hear the phrase "hellfire and brimstone preacher?" For many Christians, such a description likely produces an image of a scowling, judgmental man that yells at people and does all that he can to "scare them into the kingdom." I think most of us would agree that Christians should be joyful, compassionate people that reflect the beauty of Christ. Surely we are supposed to be lights that shine in the darkness, not people who appear filled with hate and rage. But some have wrongly concluded that to be consistent with our desire to win people to Christ through a loving, positive influence, we should avoid words and methods that tend to put people in a negative mindset toward us. They think, "How will people ever be won to Christ if we turn them off even before they have a chance to hear the good news?"

Several years ago, a Christian brother told me that unless the hearer is troubled or bothered by what he is hearing in my gospel presentation, then I am failing to share the entire gospel with

him. I remember reacting negatively toward what my Christian brother had to say. Like most Christians, I believed it was my primary duty to talk about the “good news” of forgiveness through Christ and not focus so much on things like sin and judgment. Subsequently, I began noticing how people were responding to what I was telling them and began to realize that the “good news” was coming across as irrelevant. The hearers seemed apathetic toward it. I began to realize that while I had good intentions to lovingly share the good news of Jesus Christ with those around me, I was failing to fulfill my responsibility to really love them. If I behold a blind man walking on a bridge that has been washed out ahead of him and it is apparent that he is unaware of the pending danger, it is my responsibility to warn him. Failing to do so would be hateful and tantamount to murder or at least manslaughter. I resolved that I must learn how to present the full gospel of Jesus with a heart of sincere love for the hearers but to do it in such a way that they might better understand their actual predicament. Now when I evangelize, I do so with a strong determination to help the hearer perceive his actual condition before I tell him about the remedy. I continue talking about sin and judgment until I perceive that the person gains a mental comprehension of his predicament. I want him to understand that the wrath of God is resting on him (John 3:36) so that when I explain God’s plan of salvation through Christ, he sees the reason for Jesus’ death in his behalf. As you will discover in the first section of the book, this is precisely what Jesus and His apostles did in order to prepare the hearers for the good news. Following their example has been eye opening for me because I have seen with my own eyes how these principles really work.

To prepare you for the work of evangelism, this book first surveys the New Testament to establish the message and methods that the apostles and Jesus used to make disciples. Then, it presents principles gleaned from this survey to help you go and do the work of evangelism. These principles cover the various phases of making disciples from the initial proclamation of the gospel, to discerning when a disciple is made and concluding with what must take place once disciples are made. The more you attempt to put these principles into practice, the more resistance you should expect from forces opposed to Jesus. I have added some instruction about this and also included a short section about the importance of prayer in this edition of the book. Also, I have provided some helpful evangelism tools along with some supportive instruction concerning evangelism in the Appendixes.

I encourage you to read this book in the same manner that the Bereans digested the Apostle Paul’s teachings.

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

I believe that if you will diligently examine the biblical principles presented in this book, your understanding of evangelism will be refined and you will be better equipped for the work of evangelism. Will you prayerfully consider with me what the Bible says about this great task that Jesus has given to us?

Refine your understanding of evangelism.

A faithful steward not only carries out his responsibilities, he strives to do it in a way that most honors his master. To please his master, he carefully does his job as instructed by his master. God has entrusted the work of advancing His Kingdom to all believers. This makes us stewards.

It is only fitting, therefore, that we learn how to evangelize as instructed by our Master. We should naturally desire to become most useful and effective. This does not mean that brand new believers should wait to evangelize. On the contrary, all Christians are called to be witnesses no matter how long they have known the Lord. Yet, in our desire to honor the Lord, we should make up our minds to become increasingly proficient at proclaiming the gospel, for HIS NAME'S SAKE. We must study and learn our Master's instructions. To honor our Master, we must be willing to conform the way we evangelize to His instructions.

If you desire to evangelize like Jesus and the apostles, you will most likely have to refine your understanding of evangelism to some degree. Since the Bible is our most important resource, this book carefully examines how Jesus and His apostles evangelized. This examination is provided to help the sincere Bible student begin the process of abandoning unbiblical views about evangelism. In addition to the Bible, God has given to His church, evangelists and pastors, so that His people may be equipped and strengthened to do this great work and to do it in a way that most honors Him (see Ephesians 4:11-13).

Know the major barrier to the gospel.

Immediately after my conversion, I could not wait to tell all my friends the gospel. I was sure they would all want to be saved. I was shocked when they rejected it. Why did they reject it? I know now that it was because their hearts were darkened. *“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:21)*. Because God enlightened my heart, the gospel was suddenly glorious to me. But my friends were still unable to see the glory of the gospel because their hearts remained darkened. I also know now that the real problem was their hearts, not their intellect. ***“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified” (Romans 10:10)***.

If you speak with enough unbelievers, you will see that the most blatant symptom of a darkened heart is an inability to see oneself rightly and to see God rightly. People believe they are not that bad and that God's standard of righteousness is less than absolute. They are good in their own eyes, at least better than many “wicked” people who have committed crimes such as murder. They think, “Surely, I am not bad enough to warrant eternal punishment in hell.” They turn a blind eye toward their own sin and take refuge in the false notion that God will accept them on the basis of their own goodness. The New Testament demonstrates that Jesus and His apostles understood that due to their darkened hearts, unbelievers cannot see themselves or God rightly. This understanding affected the way they evangelized.

They reasoned about sin, righteousness and judgment

A brief survey of the New Testament will show **that in order to properly convey the gospel, Jesus and the apostles always spoke about sin, righteousness and judgment as THE means to prepare hearts to receive the gospel seed**. Until you embrace this principle, your understanding of evangelism will not be formed in accordance with the biblical pattern. I am fully convinced that anyone who does not purposely reason with people about sin, righteousness and judgment, or merely skims over these issues, WILL FAIL to present the gospel the way Jesus and the apostles presented it.

Before beginning this discussion, let me address a common misconception that seems to keep many people from taking an honest look at these matters. Some would suggest that if a person insists on discussing issues like sin, righteousness and judgment, he is an unloving person who knows nothing about the love of God. Jonathan Edwards lived about two hundred years ago and

taught many of the things you will read in this book. His most famous sermon was titled, “*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.*” It was perhaps the most famous sermon ever delivered in the U.S. In it he spoke much of sin, righteousness and judgment. Many people took offense at some of the things he said and to this day some ridicule him and think he was just an angry man whose God was an angry God. This same man said, “*The work of redemption which the gospel makes known, above all things affords motives to love; for that work was the most glorious and wonderful exhibition of love that ever was seen or heard of. Love is the principle thing that the gospel dwells on when speaking of God, and of Christ.*”¹ Do these sound like words of an angry, scowling man? I agree with Edwards that the gospel can be summed up in the word LOVE. Yet, I maintain that it is impossible to properly convey the wonders of Christ’s love without first discussing the realities of sin, righteousness and judgment. I don’t want to give the impression that I intentionally offend people with Bible truth only to make them miserable. I can assure you from much experience that it is possible to talk with people about such subjects with a heart full of compassion.

Paul reasoned about sin, righteousness and judgment.

The Apostle Paul is considered by most Bible believers to be the greatest evangelist and missionary that ever lived. God used Paul to spread the gospel and plant churches throughout the civilized world of his day. Paul often urged his readers to imitate his ways. He claimed that the message he preached was the word of God and commended the Thessalonians for receiving it as such and spreading it throughout the region of Macedonia and Achaia (I Thessalonians 2:13 & 1:8). It logically follows that if we preach the same message and do it after the manner of Paul, we will be doing it in the way that God desires.

In the book of Acts, Luke noted that Paul was in the habit of “reasoning” with both Jews and Gentiles, trying to persuade them. Often he did this in synagogues. In Athens he did it in the market place “day by day,” and in Ephesus he did it publicly from “house to house.” (See Acts 17:2-4, 17:17, 18:1-4, 18:19, 20:20-21.) How did Paul reason with his hearers? According to I Corinthians 2:1, Paul’s message and his preaching was, “*Not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that the faith of the hearer’s might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.*” What did Paul reason with his hearers about? The content of Paul’s message is summarized in his statement, “***We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles***” (I Corinthians 1:23). Let us now consider the biblical record in order to gain a fuller comprehension of what Paul preached in order to make disciples. In the book of Acts, Luke said that Paul’s message included the following:

- A call to repent: *I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must **turn to God in repentance** and have faith in our Lord Jesus (Acts 20:21). “first to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached **that they should repent and turn to God** and prove their repentance by their deeds” (Acts 26:20).*
- Teaching about why the Christ had to suffer: *“I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen-- **that the Christ would suffer** and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23).*
- Discourse about righteousness, self-control and judgment: ***“Paul discoursed about righteousness, self-control and judgment to come”*** (Acts 24:25).
- Teaching about the Kingdom of God: *“From morning till evening Paul explained and **declared to them the Kingdom of God** and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets” (Acts 28:23).*

As we will see later, Luke's record of Paul's message is consistent with the letters Paul wrote and also with the message that Jesus preached. But before moving on, let us consider some of the phrases Luke recorded to glean further understanding of Paul's message.

Turn to God in repentance- Consider the word "repentance." This word is used throughout the New Testament. John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles used it. It means essentially to stop going one way and go the opposite way. It implies that the hearer is going the wrong way and needs to turn and go the opposite direction. Those who used the word repent or repentance were calling attention to something negative about the hearer. The hearer was living a life that was wrong in God's sight and must turn completely around to avoid judgment. From this phrase we know that the message of Jesus and His apostles often pointed out that which was wrong about the lives of their hearers.

That the Christ would suffer- Admittedly, Paul had to spend much time proving to the Jews that the Christ would suffer. They were expecting that when the Christ arrived, He would usher in a new kingdom on earth that would crush the Roman Empire. So, Paul simply quoted Old Testament scriptures to prove that the Christ would suffer. But eventually, Paul would have to reason with the hearers as to why the Christ had to suffer. In his epistles, Paul does this very thing by pointing to the depravity of all mankind and their just condemnation (see Romans 1:18-2:2, 3:10-21; Galatians 3:19-22; Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 1:13-14, 21-22; II Thessalonians 1:7-9). According to Paul, all people are born into the kingdom of darkness that is ruled by Satan. Being aligned with Satan under his rule, all people are born into the world alienated from God and are His enemies. In order for His enemies to have peace declared between themselves and God, they have to be reconciled on His terms. These terms require full punishment for all crimes that God's enemies commit against Him. Since the enemies of God can never make up for their crimes, they will have to either suffer eternally away from the holy God or receive a perfect right standing through a qualified, sinless substitute who will suffer in their place for all the crimes they committed. God Himself became that sacrifice and this is the only sacrifice that satisfies His righteous demands. **In order to reason with his hearers as to why the Christ had to suffer, Paul taught them these things.** His teaching did not shy away from identifying the absolute wretchedness found in every man. He did not make God out to be an unrighteous Judge that can simply sweep the sins of His enemies under the carpet. Rather, Paul taught that God has appointed a day that He will judge the world through Jesus Christ and cast all the unbelievers into everlasting torment.

Righteousness, self-control and judgment to come- We can glean more about Paul's methods and message from Luke's record of Paul's hearing with Felix.

"Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." (Acts 24:24-25).

According to Luke's record, part of Paul's dialog about faith in Christ Jesus included subjects like "righteousness, self-control and judgment to come." From the testimony in Acts, we get the impression that Paul's captors had a high respect for him. This suggests that he must not have acted like a scowling "fire and brimstone preacher" pictured in so many Hollywood movies. We get the impression that it is possible to discuss subjects like hell, sin, and righteousness in an

intelligent, sincere and loving manner. Paul did not “look down” in judgment on his hearers or “rant and rave” at them. Nevertheless, it is easy to prove that he spoke about things that were undoubtedly offensive to them.

Declared to them the Kingdom of God- Implied in the phrase, “Kingdom of God,” is the concept of authority. In a kingdom, the king has absolute authority over his subjects. Those living in democratic countries have difficulty feeling the weight of this. We have no concept of what it is like to live under the absolute rule of a sovereign king. If we did, we might have a greater sense of fear toward God as the One who has absolute authority over His subjects. We might understand better just how dangerous it is to offend such a King. When Paul and Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, the hearers understood these things because such rule existed in most human governments of the day.

Paul’s writings reveal his “message.”- To learn more about the message Paul preached, we can simply read his letter to the Romans. Paul wrote this letter to people that he had not previously met in order to convey the gospel in great detail to them. In this epistle, Paul “reasons” with the reader using various biblical texts to establish his case. To imitate Paul, we should strive to convey the same message in a manner that impacts those who listen as Paul’s letter impacted those who received it. Does Paul’s letter to the Romans contain arguments designed to prove the existence of God and authority of His word? No! On the contrary, he merely states as fact that God has declared all that people need to know through the creation so that any who deny His existence are without excuse. Also, rather than debate the authority of the Bible, he attributes complete authority to it by the way he quotes from it as the Word of God.

Let us now consider how his message, as laid out for us in his letter to the Romans, would impact the hearer or reader. In the first section (1:1 through 3:20), Paul argues from Old Testament scripture that all people are natural born enemies of God, wicked in His sight and justly condemned and fully deserving of His wrath. Paul does not beat around the bush or sugar coat this message. He quotes from various Old Testament scriptures to establish truths such as those that follow:

- Absolutely nobody “seeks God” (3:11).
- There is absolutely nobody that qualifies as “good” in God’s sight (3:10 & 12).
- In themselves, everyone is useless for God’s purposes (3:12).
- All people are liars by nature (3:13).
- It is the nature of people to murder (3:15).
- All people of the world are justly condemned and accountable to God for their actions (3:9 & 19).

All of the gospel themes that Paul discusses from 3:21 to the end of the book are based upon the foundation first laid in 1:1 – 3:20. In other words, when Paul reasoned with people about Jesus, he obviously considered it essential to first get personal with them about their sin and prove that they deserved condemnation before discussing God’s chosen remedy as seen in the substitutionary death of Jesus. Paul was guided by the truth that Jesus came to save sinners, not those who think they can come before God based upon their own righteousness (see Luke 5:31-32).

Jesus reasoned about sin, righteousness and judgment.

Our consideration of Jesus’ teachings will serve to underscore why Paul and the other apostles spent so much time discussing sin, righteousness and judgment to come.

The world has always had its philosophers who, like the Athenians, spend “*their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas*” (Acts 17:21). They pride themselves in their ability to reason with their minds supposing to understand the meaning of life. But Jesus, the Creator of life, is the meaning of life. Jesus’ teachings were not like any man that had ever lived before Him. In contrast to a mere man, “*He taught as one who had authority*” (Matthew 7:29). As the Great Physician, He understood the sickness of the human heart. He said, “*Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander*” (Matthew 15:19). When He made statements like this, He spoke them as if He was the Physician that has the knowledge and ability to heal, not as one who also was in need of healing. You and I can quote Matthew 15:19 to others to help them better understand the condition of the hearts of all people, including our own. But Jesus spoke these words as if they were coming directly from the mouth of God. He spoke as One having authority and as the One who “looks at the heart” (see I Samuel 16:7 and John 2:25). As we consider how Jesus made disciples, keep in mind that, being the Great Physician, He always sought to cut into the hearts of His listeners. If you read the gospels with this in mind, you will note that much of His teachings dealt with the sinfulness of man and the righteousness of God in order to sweep away the lie that each man loves to believe- the lie that he is righteous enough to stand before God. Jesus said, “*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*” (Luke 5:31-32). For a man to become a disciple of Jesus, he must first be stripped of the lie that he has been clinging to and see himself as one who has greatly offended God as a wicked criminal headed for punishment. When Jesus talked with them, He spoke about things that would help people gain this type of understanding and eventually embrace it in their hearts. In order to become more effective evangelists, we must follow the pattern of Jesus and His disciples. Consider some examples of how Jesus spoke words that would help people better understand their sinful condition before the righteous God.

One of my favorite examples is Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman in the fourth chapter of John’s gospel. First, we notice that Jesus loved this sinner. It made no difference to Him that she was a woman or that she was a Samaritan. The Jews considered Samaritans inferior. Jewish men generally did not speak with Samaritans. To top it off, this one was a woman. Jesus saw her as one who was alienated from God and in need of reconciliation. His love drove Him to speak words to her that would result in her salvation. He does not quickly hit her with the fact that she is a rebel against God. First, He speaks of something for which her soul longs- living water that springs up to eternal life. For the first part of the conversation, she remains fixed in her self-righteousness without facing her need of salvation. It was in a state of unbelief that she said, “*Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.*” Her statement seems to have a sarcastic tone. She really didn’t believe what Jesus had said to her. Knowing that the woman was refusing to see herself rightly, Jesus then confronted her with her own sinful life. This pricked her heart and made her feel uncomfortable. So, she began to squirm and tried to get the focus off her sinfulness. But Jesus continued the dialog with more foundational truth. From this narrative, we observe that once He got her attention by talking about the living water, Jesus began working the soil of her heart by tilling it with truth about her sinfulness.

After His words reminded her of her sinfulness, He introduced Himself as the Messiah. Then, faith sprang to life in the Samaritan woman and she immediately began testifying to her neighbors with spontaneous excitement that she had found the Messiah (see John 4:7-30). It is in this immediate context that Jesus instructs His disciples to go into the harvest and reap as He was reaping.

To prepare the soil of the human heart so that people would understand their sinful condition, Jesus often spoke in parables knowing that those parables would benefit some people and not others. For example, He used the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector to teach that only those who see themselves as the wretched tax collector in need of God's mercy can be justified (Luke 18:9-14). By identifying the repentant tax collector as the one who was justified before God, He disturbed those who were trusting in their own righteousness.

Jesus often used the law to confront people with God's righteousness so that they might begin to see themselves rightly. For example, a lawyer once asked him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Rather than answering the way we would answer, Jesus said, "*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?*" The lawyer answered, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*"; and, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Then Jesus said, "*You have answered correctly, do this and you will live*" (Luke 10:25-28). Rather than tell the lawyer that all his righteous deeds were as filthy rags, He simply applied the law to the man's heart. He knew that this man (like all unbelievers) was seeing himself as righteous enough. Perhaps the man was bothered and wanted some reassurance that he was acceptable to God, so he asked, "*And who is my neighbor?*" (The Bible says that he wanted to justify himself.) Then Jesus proceeded to tell him a parable about a Samaritan who acted in a loving manner toward a man who was left injured and dying. In this discourse, Jesus still did not present the lawyer with the "good news." He confronted him with the very law that the man was counting on to make himself right with God. Jesus merely said, "*Go and do likewise.*" Jesus was using the law to show to this man that he was failing to measure up to its righteousness. From Jesus' command to go and do likewise we can deduce that the man had been failing to act in the way that the Samaritan treated the injured man. Not only this, the lawyer was probably thinking of himself as far superior to all Samaritans. While we would want to take this opportunity to share the good news of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' sacrificial death, Jesus was content to leave this man without explaining it to him. It appears that Jesus did not think that this ground was quite ready for the gospel seed to be planted.

Jesus used the law in a similar way when confronting the rich young ruler who also saw himself as righteous (Luke 18:18-23). Jesus confronted him with the law and the young man said that he had kept it all his life. Rather than tell him he was self-deceived, Jesus merely said, "*Go and sell all your possessions and give them to the poor and then come and follow me.*" By saying this, Jesus revealed to this man that he was failing to keep the law. To fulfill the law, we must love others as ourselves. This man loved himself more than others because he would not share his wealth with anyone. The man went away miserable because he recognized that he loved his riches too much to let go of them. This exchange showed that he really did not believe in his heart that he needed salvation. Otherwise, he would have followed Jesus' advice. He got a glimpse of his wretchedness. The rich young ruler was not willing to let go of the life he loved so much. And according to Jesus, a man must "lose his own life" in order to inherit eternal life (see Matthew 10:39, 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, 17:33).

Besides these things, Jesus taught the following:

- All people are born wretched sinners with hearts full of murder and adultery (Matthew 15:10-20, John 8:44).
- People need to repent. "***From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near"*** (Matthew 4:17).
- Judgment is coming and all deserve to be cast into hell (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 7:21-23; 8:12; 10:28; 13:37-50; 22:13; 25:30; Luke 13:24-30; 14:16; 16:19-31).

-Unless a person lets go of the life he loves so much, he will not inherit eternal life (Matthew 10:39).

-A person must be willing to die for Jesus (Matt.16:24-28).

-All true believers will be hated by the world (Matthew 10:22-23; John 15:20-25).

Jesus and His apostles taught and preached about the Kingdom of God. This kingdom is the opposite of the kingdom of darkness. All things pertaining to the kingdom of light are offensive to the subjects in the kingdom of darkness. Being in darkness, the people are blinded by their king Satan (II Corinthians 4:4). In order to help people begin to see, we must follow the pattern of Jesus and His apostles. People need to be lovingly confronted with their true condition before God and warned that all His enemies will rightly be thrown into eternal hell at the coming judgment. Just as Jesus did not skip over these matters, we too must be willing to discuss them. One of our goals must be to help the hearer understand his condition before God and we should be willing to take as much time and be as direct as necessary in order to accomplish it. He must begin to see the vileness of his sin in God's sight.

Suggestion: Try reading the book of Matthew again taking special notice of how Jesus interacted with people. This reading will underscore what I have written here.

Section 2: Doing the Work of Evangelism

Don't hide your purpose or identity as a Christian.

If you tell people that you are a Christian who wants to talk with them about Jesus and the way to heaven, many of them will tell you they are not interested and walk away. Fearing this, some believers withhold their intentions hoping to warm people up before turning the conversation to the gospel. Jesus and his apostles never attempted to hide their purpose for initiating conversations.

It is true that if you tell people that you are a Christian who wants to talk with them about Jesus and the way to heaven, many of them will tell you they are not interested and terminate the conversation. But if you attempt to hide your purpose, the conversation may never get around to the gospel. You may end up talking with them for an hour about inconsequential things. Then, when you attempt to turn the conversation to the gospel, a person will just as likely tell you that he is not interested. He may even think you were being dishonest with him for the past hour. In reality, he would be justified for thinking this way. I guarantee that if you attempt to evangelize people while not being forthright about your purpose, gospel proclamation will be hit and miss and you will fail to become the evangelist that God desires to make of you. In order to fulfill the great commission, you must be purposeful about proclaiming the gospel. You must make up your mind in advance to be honest with people about your purpose for talking with them. Many people will tell you they are not interested but God will arrange for some to listen in order that they hear the gospel and eventually believe.

When I evangelize, I introduce myself as a Christian. I then say that I am talking with people about the way to heaven. I then ask them if they are interested in spiritual things and the way to heaven. I do not attempt to mask my intentions. Some people tell me they are not interested but if I keep approaching people this way, it generally does not take long for me to find someone who is interested enough to listen. God is the One who is at work behind the scene to cause people to listen. Therefore, let us place our confidence in His ability to arrange for that rather than our ability to warm people up to us.

Prepare the soil by helping them see their predicament.

Usually, if you ask a man if he is a sinner, he will respond with statements like, “Of course, everyone is a sinner. Nobody is perfect.” How does this answer strike you? Do you think that if you get a man to admit he is a sinner in this way that he sees himself as the Bible describes him? Let me assure you that his answer suggests just the opposite. In reality, his answer is an attempt to justify his sin. It serves as an excuse. After all, everyone is a sinner. Such a response shows that the man does not comprehend how greatly his sin offends the Holy God. This answer actually shifts some of the blame for his sin away from himself and onto God for creating him this way.

Generally, if you ask a man how a person can be made right with God, he will essentially say that as long as he tries to live a good life, God will let him into heaven. This perspective indicates a failure to comprehend the absolute righteousness of God. It makes God out to be less than perfect in His justice. It suggests that God is like a human judge who accepts plea bargains in exchange for a lighter sentence. It suggests that God will let some of those who are “guilty” of breaking His law go unpunished.

As we observed in Section 1, Jesus and the apostles always reasoned with people about sin, righteousness and judgment as THE means to prepare the heart to receive the gospel seed. They knew that, *“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God” (I Corinthians 2:14)*. They understood that unregenerate people are spiritually blind so that:

1. They do not see themselves as God sees them.
2. They do not see God as absolutely righteous.
3. They do not see how their sin offends the holy God.

These deficiencies are common to all people of all religions and are THE reason why people do not come to Jesus for salvation. Because of this truth, the following statements are also true:

“If a man could see himself as the absolute righteous God sees him, he would gladly believe the gospel and bow his knee to Jesus.”

“Until a man gets a glimpse of himself as the absolute righteous God sees him, he simply will not come to Christ.”

We must try to help people see themselves and God rightly so they can be saved. To do this, we must explain what the Bible says about God’s absolute righteousness and what it says about their wretched condition as rebels against God.

While it is always helpful to understand the culture of the person with whom we are speaking, the message itself never changes. What do the following people all have in common?

- The Jew
- The Muslim
- The polytheistic Hindu
- The Buddhist
- The animist from China
- The atheist
- The Jehovah’s Witness

These people are all sinners in the hands of an angry God. It makes no difference whether or not they believe that God exists, or that there is more than one God or that the Bible is the Word of God or that Jesus is God the Son. Our message remains the same. We must first try to help them see themselves and God rightly so that they begin to realize that in reality, God views them as His enemies who rightly deserve the sentence of eternal hell.

When Jesus spoke with the woman at the well and when Paul addressed the people at Athens, they opened their conversations by saying things calculated to get the attention of their hearers. They did not immediately begin hammering the people about their sin. But before they even began to speak, they had full intentions of addressing issues like sin, righteousness and judgment. Their opening attention-getting statements were merely the means they used to direct the conversation to the weightier matters intended to cut to the heart. This is the pattern we see in discussions initiated by Jesus and His apostles. If an atheist insists that there is no God, he does it to his own condemnation. We have no power to make him believe “from the heart” that God exists. If a Muslim refuses to listen, claiming that the Bible cannot be trusted, he does so to his own condemnation. We have no power to make him believe “from the heart” that the Bible is God’s Word. If a Jehovah’s Witness insists that Jesus is something less than God, he does so to his own condemnation. We have no power to make him believe “from the heart” that Jesus is Lord. Though it may be possible to convince some people of truth intellectually, it is impossible to make them believe it “from their heart.” Only God can do this. Our job is to humbly speak the truth of the full gospel with a heart of love for God as Jesus and His disciples spoke it. But it is also our job to seek God’s power to do so and to learn how to do it more effectively. He is able to make us skillful surgeons that know how to specifically apply the scalpel of truth in such a way that it produces true conviction. Even if the hearer refuses to believe at that moment, the seed has opportunity to take root in soil that is properly prepared.

I have presented the gospel in this way to hundreds of people that had actually heard it before I explained it to them. But because I patiently and lovingly first helped them to understand that, according to the Bible, they are considered wicked in God’s sight and fully deserving of hell, many of them told me that the message they were hearing from me was new to them, even though they had already heard it. Because they had not understood the Bible’s teaching about sin, righteousness and judgment to come, the gospel did not register in their minds and it did not leave an impression on their hearts. The connection between their sin and the cross did not take place until they first heard what the Bible says about their condition before God. Many have heard the phrase, “Jesus died for our sins.” Now, for the first time, many people with whom I have spoken finally understood the connection between their sin and the need for Jesus’ sacrificial death.

Steer conversations down the biblical path!

Since it is our first goal to help the hearer see his predicament, we need to steer the conversation accordingly. In order to build a foundation for a discussion that will accomplish this, first ascertain what the hearer believes about the way to heaven. This may be as simple as asking him to tell you how a person can gain heaven. You could ask, “Why should God let you or me into heaven?” Virtually every person you meet will essentially tell you that in order to get to heaven, a man must earn acceptance with God by doing good works. Make it your first goal to get the person to vocalize this in his own words. Once he does, the foundation is laid for a potentially fruitful discussion. At this point, you might say, “According to the Bible, it is impossible to get to heaven that way.” You can then begin to teach him what the Bible says

about his sinfulness, God's righteousness and the judgment to come. As a result, he will realize that according to the Bible, he cannot earn his way to heaven and that he stands condemned.

Know the milestones of an Effective Gospel Discussion

You can begin a gospel conversation talking about perhaps anything imaginable. The conversation is dynamic so it will have a tendency to go in various directions. Lack of time might prevent you from fully presenting the gospel during the conversation. But if you achieve the following basic milestones, you will most likely end up presenting the entire gospel so that the unbeliever comprehends it at least with his mind. I recommend that you let these milestones guide you through every gospel conversation.

Milestone 1: Get the unbeliever to tell you what he believes is "the way to heaven."³

This milestone can happen near the beginning of a discussion and it serves as THE foundation for the rest of the conversation.

Milestone 2: Get the unbeliever to either wonder or actually say out loud, "Well, what hope is there for anyone?...you seem to be saying that everyone is doomed to go to hell forever."

Achieving this milestone may take up to an hour or two in some cases. The only way to achieve this milestone is to talk about God's absolute righteousness and man's absolute sinfulness. It requires patience to do this properly. If you gloss over this without the unbeliever coming to this conclusion in his mind, he will not properly see the connection to the cross. Jesus' death will remain unimportant to him. So keep talking about sin, righteousness and judgment until he begins to wonder, "What hope is there for anyone?"

Milestone 3: Help him see how Jesus made it possible for him to be reconciled to God through His substitutionary death.

Milestone 4: Help him count the cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus. (Explain what happens when God regenerates a person. Tell him how He did this for you.)

End of excerpt

Books Written by Tom Bear

Church (according to the Bible): Most pastors wish that the members of their churches would grow and flourish more. The church members often sense that God has purposes for them but they don't know what He wants them to do. They often end up playing the role of an unfulfilled spectator. Church examines the early New Testament Church and its teachings for answers to this universal problem. It demonstrates how certain unbiblical attitudes and traditions exist which cultivate this unhealthy spectator mindset. Church challenges leaders and "laypeople" to identify and discard these unbiblical attitudes and practices that stifle spiritual health. This book asserts that if the pattern of the early New Testament Church is followed today, Christians will mature at a greater pace and experience fulfillment as active participants in the advancement of Christ's Kingdom. (160 pages)

E-Book available from Amazon.com at <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B006FL00EO>. Paperback available from Bring My Sheep Back Books at <http://bringmysheepback.com/biblical-church>.

Bringing Back the Gospel: In the 21st century, many evangelism techniques are being used that have no biblical foundation. *Bringing Back the Gospel*, examines the Bible to determine what Christians should and should not do in order to fulfill the Great Commission. Christians all over

the world consider this book an excellent instructional resource that is firmly grounded in the Bible. (154 pages) E-Book available from Amazon.com at <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B006FXUME0>. Paperback available from Bring My Sheep Back Books at <http://bringmysheepback.com/bringing-back-the-gospel>.

Bring My Sheep Back presents a candid framework for the process of restoring Christians that stray. Most of the books that deal with this subject approach it from the standpoint of solving conflicts between Christians. *Bring My Sheep Back* is founded on Jesus' teaching to put the interests of the straying Christian ahead of our own desire for immediate relief of pain caused by the one caught in sin. Personal observations along with much attention to biblical instruction produce a very useful and thorough resource for church leaders and lay people who desire to restore Christians trapped by sin. This book warns against dependence on man-made approaches to solving relational problems. Whether it involves private sin or public scandal, or even cases that involve the governing authorities, biblical principles are taught as foundational to the process of restoration. (130 pages)

E-Book available from Amazon.com at <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B006FXEDMM>.

Paperback available from Bring My Sheep Back Books at <http://BringMySheepBack.com>.

Birth Control: A Spiritual Shackle- Did you know that before the twentieth century, the Protestant Church boldly spoke out against the practice of birth control? They were opposed to any act of man that interfered with the natural order of procreation. Men such as John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Arthur Pink and Augustine were vehemently opposed to birth control. Today, Birth control is not just tolerated, it is embraced by the Protestant Church. Why has the Protestant Church changed its position? Is it possible that Christians living before the twentieth century were all mistaken? Why did they take a stand against birth control? Is it possible that the church of the nineteenth century was better equipped to discern right from wrong? Using six biblical arguments, this book demonstrates that birth control is a worldly practice that opposes God's will for His people, violates the marriage covenant and is an attack on the very character of God. (64 pages)

E-Book available from Amazon.com at <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B006J749NM>. Paperback available from Bring My Sheep Back Books at <http://bringmysheepback.com/other-books>.

Christian Marriage: This book provides biblical principles that if applied, will result in harmony in the marriage and glory to God. Some will undoubtedly say that many problems in marriage are far too complex for such a short book to address. It is the premise of this book, however, that the source of all problems in Christian marriages are the result of failure to live as God has taught us to live in His Word. If a Christian couple lives in accordance with God's principles described in *Christian Marriage*, true harmony is guaranteed. (50 pages)

E-Book available from Amazon.com at <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B006J9EIFO>. Paperback available from Bring My Sheep Back Books at <http://bringmysheepback.com/other-books>.

Old Testament Historical Narrative Bible Curriculum- This course is designed to stimulate the student to read through the Old Testament historical narrative so that he becomes familiar with the history of God's work to bring about redemption through Jesus Christ. By reading just one Bible chapter each day, the entire Old Testament historical narrative can be covered in less than six months. Questions are provided to help students read with the purpose of understanding the content and help the teacher measure the comprehension of the student. The answered questions also provide a basis for weekly or biweekly family or group discussion. As the student

becomes more familiar with the Old Testament narrative, he will begin to understand how each part of the Old and New Testaments fit together into a harmonious message of redemption. Paperback available from Bring My Sheep Back Books at <http://bringmysheepback.com/other-books>.